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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 001129

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL/IRF, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [VM](#) [RELFREE](#) [HUMANR](#)

SUBJECT: VIETNAMESE PASTOR TRAN MAI RELEASED FROM DETENTION

REF: a) HCMC 1123; b) HCMC 789

1. (SBU) We spoke with Pastor Tran Mai, at home and in good health on September 7, and confirmed his release on September 6 after eight days detention. The pastor said he was unclear as to why he was detained at the Cambodia/Vietnam border on August 29 (ref a). He stated that, as on previous occasions, he traveled to the U.S. through Cambodia and then sought to return to Vietnam via the same route. He did note, however, that this time he sought to enter Vietnam using a local border gate and not at the usual international border crossing (from where he presumably departed Vietnam). The police told him that it was illegal for him to enter Vietnam through a non-international border gate.

2. (SBU) According to the pastor, once in custody, the police did not focus on his immigration violation, but on his religious activities. The police pressed the pastor on his "frequent" overseas travel, which organizations were sponsoring him and whether he had links to groups or individuals in Cambodia -- he said he had none. The police also quizzed Pastor Mai on his links with detained Mennonite pastor/human rights activist Nguyen Hong Quang as well as religious activities on the margins of the South East Asia sporting games "SEA Games 22", which Vietnam hosted in December 2003. (Note: during the SEA games, local authorities detained 15 Christian missionaries for distributing unauthorized leaflets with religious content to spectators in HCMC. Pastor Tran Mai was detained for 24 hours during the police investigation of the incident. Pastor Quang was arrested on June 8 at his home in HCMC and remains in pre-trial detention. For more details on Pastor Quang's arrest see ref b. End Note.)

3. (SBU) The pastor said that during his detention the police treated him respectfully, although he was upset to be kept in the same facility with common criminal suspects. He said that the police kept all his personal belongings including his passport, cell phone and Vietnamese ID card. In a separate conversation on September 7, the pastor's wife told us that police officials had instructed the pastor to check in with police officials in HCMC on a daily basis.

WINNICK